

CLAIMS

- 5 1. A method of drying a lactulose solution, comprising
- 10 introducing the solution into a vacuum chamber at elevated temperature and at reduced pressure so that the solution forms a foam;
- drying the foam under reduced pressure; and
- optionally, milling or grinding or breaking the dried foam into powder.
2. A method according to Claim 1 comprising extruding the solution through a nozzle so that the solution foams as it exits the nozzle.
3. A method according to Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein the foam is dried at a temperature which is reduced over time.
4. A method according to Claim 3 comprising passing the foam through a plurality of drying zones, each zone being at a different temperature, the temperature of the zones reducing from one zone to the next.
5. A method according to Claim 4 comprising passing the foam through a first zone at a temperature of at least 100°C and passing the foam through a final zone at a temperature of 50°C or less.
6. A method according to Claim 1 or 2 wherein the foam is dried at a temperature which increases and then decreases.
7. A method according to any of Claims 1-6 comprising passing the foam through a first zone at a temperature of about 110-130°C for a period of about 8-15 minutes, passing the foam through a second zone at a temperature of ~~about~~ 70-90°C for a period of ~~about~~ 8-15 minutes and

passing the foam through a third zone at a temperature of about 20-40°C for about 8-15 minutes.

8. A method according to any of Claims 1-7 wherein the pressure in the vacuum chamber is maintained below 50mbar.

9. A method according to any of Claims 1-8 wherein the drying is carried out in a belt dryer within the vacuum chamber and the method comprises evenly distributing the solution over the belt of the dryer.

10. A method of drying a lactulose solution comprising subjecting the solution to conditions of raised temperature and reduced pressure so that the solution expands into a foam, and drying the foam thereby produced.

11. A method according to Claim 10 wherein the foam is obtained at a temperature of at least 100°C and a pressure no greater than 50mbar.

12. A dry, lactulose-containing powder having a moisture content of 8% or less by weight and being substantially free of swelling or drying agent.

13. A powder according to Claim 12 having a moisture content of 6% or less by weight.

14. A powder according to Claim 12 or 13 containing 60% or more lactulose by weight.

15. A powder according to Claim 14 containing 65% or more lactulose by weight.

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Sub
A3

Sub
B1

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Sub
A4

16. A powder according to any of Claims 12 to 15 obtainable by a method of drying a lactulose solution according to any of Claims 1 to 11.
17. A dry, lactulose-containing foam.
18. A dry foam according to Claim 17 having a moisture content of 8% or less by weight.
19. A dry foam according to Claim 17 or 18 obtainable by a method of drying a lactulose solution according to any of Claims 1 to 11.

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FOOTNOTES 059/5860